

National Defence Act Amendment

task by an editorial which appeared in the *Globe and Mail*, which stated that a great many things should be brought to light before any kind of closure was brought in. Certainly before closure has been brought in by any government it has been the accepted practice not to use such a procedure unless the government has overwhelming public support for its legislation, and that it involves a matter of urgency. Certainly there is not overwhelming public support for this bill and on the basis of the admission of the minister, there is no urgency. We view with great concern the course of action the government is now following in the handling of this bill. There is no reason for that action and no explanation, except those relating to the government's embarrassment and the desire to commence the centennial session.

One can find a clue to the government's action in pushing this bill through from the statement made last Thursday by one of the minister's fans in the press gallery. A public affairs commentator said in reference to questions posed by the opposition to the minister that they had not found out the answers either. I think that situation provides another answer as to why the government wishes to terminate this debate.

Many of us have found something else very strange in relation to our unanswered questions. I refer to the rather odd but detached manner the Prime Minister has taken not only in respect of this debate but on the matter of unification itself. He has had a lifelong concern for the subject of foreign affairs and foreign policy. Defence measures are really the strong arm of foreign policy. It is startling to most of us to note that the Prime Minister is apparently disinterested in this matter. According to information revealed by the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre earlier during this debate, the only time the Prime Minister discussed this question with the former chief of staff, Air Marshal Miller, was in 1964; and at that time the major discussion was integration, not unification.

Certainly before this debate concludes we should hear from the Prime Minister about this very important matter of unification. Unification will have an effect on the whole defence future of this country. I hope because of the interrelationship between defence and foreign affairs we will hear from the Prime Minister, who has been associated with and has a great reputation in the field of foreign affairs.

Let me now refer to the questions which have not been answered—and it is my submission that if the minister will provide some answers he will find it much less difficult to get this bill passed, thus creating a more amiable atmosphere in the house. To date he has not done so, but I appeal to him to reconsider his position in the interests of putting this bill through in an orderly fashion.

Let me remind the minister of the example set by one or two of his colleagues. When the highly complex transport bill was before this house it was examined carefully—

Mr. Hellyer: Would the hon. member permit a question? Will he indicate the specific questions I have not answered?

Mr. Nesbitt: Yes, I was just going to do so. I have them enumerated and I will be very glad to bring them to the minister's attention. I would suggest to the minister that he look at the results achieved by his colleague the Minister of Transport with regard to the transportation bill. That was a very complex, technical matter. The bill went to committee and was carefully studied. A great many amendments were made to it, some 70 of which I believe were accepted by the minister. This was referred to by many writers and observers of parliament as being parliament at its best.

● (6:40 p.m.)

Then there was the Bank Act, an equally difficult and complex matter. The Minister of Finance, again, accepted many suggestions that were made. Many people thought that bill would be a matter of great controversy. There were some controversial aspects in the bill, but generally speaking it was not controversial. The minister listened to suggestions and accepted them when he thought it wise. Of course no one expects a minister to accept all suggestions made, but at least he should be prepared to accept some. In this case the Minister of National Defence has not shown an inclination to accept any of the suggestions made.

A few moments ago the minister asked what questions I have in mind that he had not specifically answered. The first question is: Who was the author, who conceived this plan of unification? Was it one of the senior staff officers; was it the minister; was it one of the minister's advisers? Who was it? I think we should know the answer to this question because this is a very important matter, one of the most important that has